

Service Inspection Report

March 2008



Waste Management

Brent London Borough Council

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Service Inspection

This inspection has been carried out by the Audit Commission under section 10 of the Local Government Act 1999 and is in line with the Audit Commission's strategic regulation principles. These principles embody the objectives of our Strategic Plan and Strategic Regulation. They also reflect the principles from *The Government's Policy on Inspection of Public Services (July 2003)*.

Audit Commission service inspections should:

- focus on public service outcomes from a user perspective;
- act as a catalyst to help inspected bodies improve their performance;
- concentrate inspection work where it will have most impact, so that it is proportionate and based on an assessment of risk;
- be based on a rigorous assessment of costs and benefits, with a concern for achieving value for money both by the inspected organisation and within the inspection regime itself;
- be, and be seen to be, independent of the inspected organisation;
- report in public, using impartial evidence to inform the public about the performance of public services so as to enhance accountability;
- involve collaborative working with other inspectorates and external review agencies to achieve greater coordination and a more holistic approach to the assessment of performance by audited and inspected bodies;
- share learning to create a common understanding of performance that encourages rigorous self assessment and better understanding of their performance by inspected organisations;
- be carried out objectively by skilled and experienced people to high standards and using relevant evidence, transparent criteria, and open review processes; and
- enable continuous learning so that inspections can become increasingly effective and efficient.

We assess services using published key lines of enquiry (KLOE) to inform our judgements. The KLOEs can be found on the Audit Commission's website at www.audit-commission.gov.uk.

This report is issued in accordance with the Audit Commission's duty under section 13 of the 1999 Act.

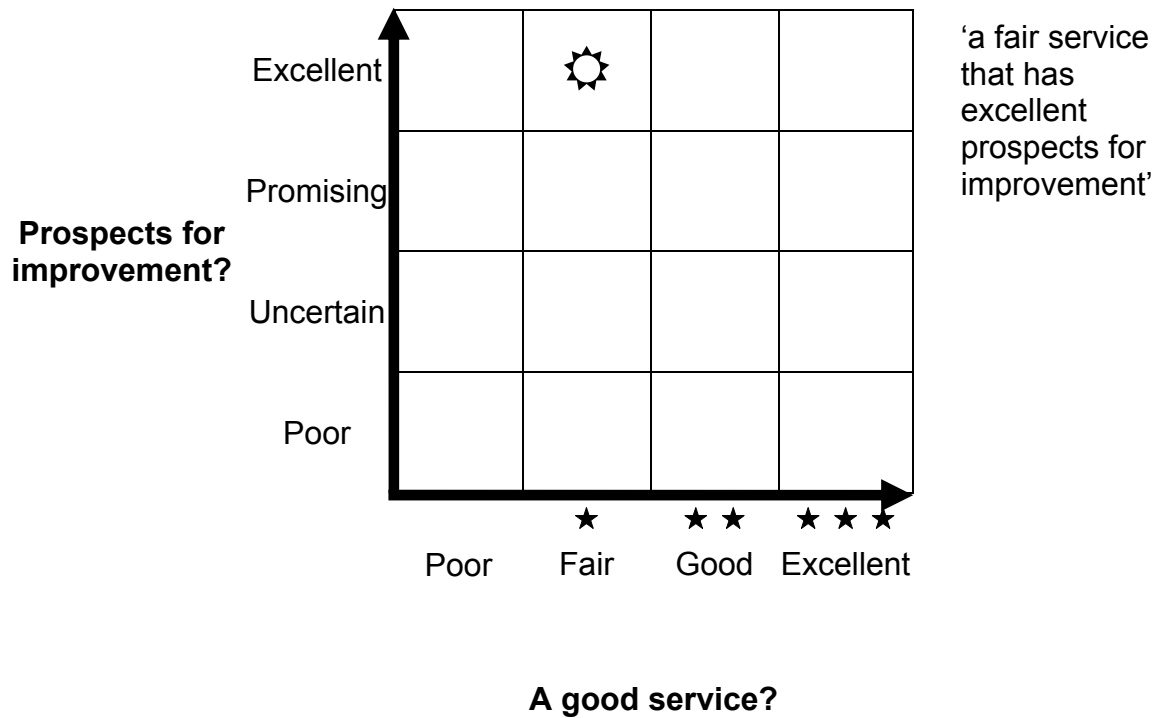
Summary

- 1 The Council has a clear commitment to protecting and improving the local environment, working with local people to deliver its wider objectives for environmental sustainability.
- 2 StreetCare services have made clear improvements in terms of the way they respond to and engage with customers and have delivered visible benefits such as cleaner streets and additional provision for recycling recognised by local people. However, the standard of street cleaning remains inconsistent in some areas such as Willesden and Kilburn.
- 3 The Council's approach to enforcement is reactive rather than strategic and coordinated and tackling graffiti remains a key challenge for the Council. This means that enforcement resources could be used more effectively.
- 4 Overall, costs of street cleaning and waste collection services remain high in comparison to the performance achieved.
- 5 The recent re-tendering of refuse collection, recycling and street cleaning using modern procurement methods has delivered a clearly specified level of service quality contract at a competitive market price. However, the service has not undertaken a robust analysis of its ward based approach to assess the impact on costs and performance to evaluate value for money.
- 6 The Council has made recent progress with internal waste minimisation but not all buildings used by the Council are included in the scheme.
- 7 The Council has recognised the need for a step change in performance if it is deliver tougher recycling targets and has taken steps to introduce compulsory recycling which is supported by local residents. However, the approach to dealing with trade waste has not been sufficiently well developed to divert it from getting into the municipal waste stream.
- 8 The Council has a track record of implementing major changes to improve services. Examples include the introduction of an integrated contract for all waste services; same day collections for all waste streams; and re-zoning of street cleaning and collections to improve service quality.
- 9 The service has the management and staff capacity to support improvement and is developing its use of ICT to develop more robust performance management processes. However, awareness of the performance framework and service standards of the contract is mixed and so not to all staff are clear about expectations.

Scoring the service

- 10 We have assessed Brent London Borough Council as providing a 'fair', one-star service that has excellent prospects for improvement. Our judgements are based on the evidence obtained during the inspection and are outlined below.

Figure 1 Scoring chart¹



Source: Audit Commission

¹ The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. The horizontal axis shows how good the service or function is now, on a scale ranging from no stars for a service that is poor (at the left-hand end) to three stars for an excellent service (right-hand end). The vertical axis shows the improvement prospects of the service, also on a four-point scale.

11 The service is a fair, one-star service because:

- the service is accessible and responsive to users, customer service is a strength and a wide range of service information such as street cleaning standards and recycling schemes is provided on the Council's website;
- the introduction of seven day working and more frequent sweeping is helping to maintain better standards of cleanliness of streets;
- the Council met its statutory recycling and composting target of 18 per cent in 2005/06 and Council achieved 21.52 per cent in 2006/07;
- the service routinely consults the community about service improvements and policies, such as compulsory recycling, and engages local groups effectively in initiatives to improve the local environment;
- the Council has been successful in tackling contamination of organic green bins, with education of persistent offenders and removal of misused bins;
- a range of methods are used to promote waste minimisation and recycling such as the Council magazine and newsletters;
- equality impact assessments have informed service improvements and initiatives targeted at minority groups have increased recycling participation rates;
- the Council's strategic framework for environmental sustainability is taking shape with a Carbon Management Strategy and implementation plan adopted in June 2007 with a carbon production reduction target of 20 per cent by 2011; and
- there is a focus on achieving value for money, through for example the recent re-tendering of the waste collection, recycling, and street cleaning services, which are now integrated into one contract with an emphasis on improved service quality at a competitive price.

However,

- there is an inconsistent understanding of standards of service expected by staff and contractors, and the advice given by call centre staff can be variable;
- there is limited strategic direction and coordination for enforcement to prevent recurrences and ensure effective use of resources, and enforcement activity has mainly been focused on ensuring businesses have trade waste agreements;
- the costs of street cleaning and waste collection are high in comparison to other Councils with similar levels of performance;
- there is shortfall in projected income for chargeable services;
- satisfaction with recycling and the civic amenity site for 2006/07 was low;
- the standard of street cleaning is inconsistent in some areas such as Willesden and Kilburn;
- some residents are confused about who to contact about street cleaning issues where land is controlled by different agencies;

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- the level of graffiti is a key concern of local people, and along with fly-posting, performance was in the worst quartile nationally in 2006/07;
- the Council's progress with minimising waste has been slow, particularly diverting trade waste from the municipal waste stream and reducing the amount of waste it produces itself;
- there remain some inequalities in access to recycling facilities and schemes for some residents, particularly flats above shops;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of campaigns and publicity on recycling rates and contamination levels is not consistent; and
- the service has not undertaken a robust analysis of the impact of ward based working arrangements on costs and performance to evaluate value for money.

12 The service has excellent prospects for improvement because:

- the Council has implemented major changes that have brought about considerable improvements for service users, such as improved cleanliness of the streets and same day collections for all household waste;
- the new contract has provided the Council with the use of a new fleet of vehicles and the provision of a depot for Brent to improve the capacity of the service;
- inequalities that exist in terms of recycling provision are steadily being addressed such as the introduction of mixed bag collection of recyclables to households living on the North Circular Road;
- targeted work with specific communities has improved recycling participation rates;
- adequate improvements have been made over the last three years across a range of national performance measures, including satisfaction rates; the combined recycling and composting rate; access to kerbside collection of recyclables, and a reduction in the proportion of land littered to a significant or heavy extent;
- the Council is introducing compulsory recycling to help achieve more stretching national targets, learning from other councils' experiences;
- appropriate modelling is undertaken to understand the likely cost implications of alternative waste management approaches;
- the service is supported by visible leadership at corporate and operational level and sustainability is a key political priority;
- contract monitoring arrangements are good and a partnership approach is enshrined in the new contract;
- funding from Transport for London (TfL) and section 106 planning obligation monies have been consistently used to improve services;

- capacity is enhanced through investment in staff, new tools, vehicles and IT systems and the adoption of flexible and cooperative ways of working; and
- the EU Competitive Dialogue Procedure has secured a competitively priced contract for the delivery of a higher quality service.

However:

- opportunities for maximising income, for example from sponsorship and working with local businesses have not been fully exploited;
- a number of recommendations from the last Audit Commission inspection in 2003 have not been fully implemented;
- monitoring of outcomes of school recycling and waste minimisation programmes is under developed;
- not all staff are conversant with the performance management framework the standard of service expected;
- there have been some issues with data quality in the service; and
- the implementation of IT developments have been delayed significantly.

Recommendations

- 13 To rise to the challenge of continuous improvement, councils need inspection reports that offer practical pointers for improvement. Our recommendations identify the expected benefits for both local people and the Council. In addition we identify the approximate costs² and indicate the priority we place on each recommendation and key dates for delivering these where they are considered appropriate. In this context the inspection team recommends that the Council should do the following.

Recommendation

R1 Develop a strategic approach to enforcement activity. In particular the Council should:

- *identify all available staff resources that might contribute to enforcement activity;*
- *engage all relevant regulatory services to ensure all sources of intelligence are used;*
- *ensure resources are deployed in a targeted manner to deliver an annual enforcement programme; and*
- *ensure appropriate links are made to educational programmes.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- development of more proactive and sustainable solutions to enforcement problems;
- more effective coordination and deployment of resources;
- integration with enforcement programmes of other services and agencies;
- complementing the Council's drive for compulsory recycling; and
- assist with the development of prevention strategies, for specific issues such as fly-tipping.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with low costs. This should be implemented by June 2008.

² Low cost is defined as less than 1 per cent of the annual service cost, medium cost is between 1 and 5 per cent and high cost is over 5 per cent.

Recommendation

R2 Give greater priority to tackling the problem of trade waste in the borough. In particular, the Council should:

- *work with the Council's own household waste contractor to explore what support they can provide;*
- *engage local groups representing businesses, including private landlords, small and medium enterprises (including those from black and minority ethnic communities) building on environmental training and advice planned in Town Centres, and larger businesses, to identify solutions specific to each of their sectors; and*
- *focus on action to minimise waste, including promotion of the business benefits of producing less waste, reusing materials and recycling.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- an increase in trade waste being diverted from the municipal waste stream, reducing landfill costs to the Council;
- increased levels of compliance by businesses reducing enforcement costs to the Council;
- reduced costs to businesses through their use of recycled materials and reduced costs of disposal; and
- more appropriate provision for minority businesses.

The implementation of this recommendation will have high impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by September 2008.

Recommendation

R3 Increase the pace of implementation of waste minimisation across the Council. In particular:

- *provide internal recycling facilities in all buildings occupied by the Council; and*
- *ensure all Council services implement waste minimisation practices.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- contribution to the Council's targets for minimising its own waste; and
- the Council will be setting an example to others of the importance of minimising waste.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with medium costs. This should be implemented by December 2008.

Recommendations

R4 Ensure consistent monitoring of the profile of customers by ethnicity, age, disability and gender to:

- *identify any specific groups who are not accessing the service or participating in initiatives in the numbers expected; and*
- *enable targeted promotion and other action to be taken to address any issues identified.*

The expected benefits of this recommendation are:

- services can be designed around specific needs of customers who might not otherwise engage with the service; and
- demonstration of value for money for all sections of the community.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2008.

Recommendation

R5 Evaluate whether the investment in StreetCare's ward-based approach to service delivery represents value for money, by:

- *undertaking a rigorous analysis of the costs and benefits.*

The expected benefit of this recommendation is:

- the Council will be adequately informed as to whether or not any changes to its practices are required to ensure it continues to improve its cost effectiveness.

The implementation of this recommendation will have medium impact with low costs. This should be implemented by April 2008.

Report

Context

The locality

- 14 The London Borough of Brent is in outer London in the North West of the capital. Brent has a very diverse population, being one of only two local authorities serving a population where the majority of people are from ethnic minority communities. The ONS population forecast for Brent in 2006 was approximately 270,000, although Council-commissioned research suggests that this figure could be conservative.
- 15 Brent is the most densely populated of the outer London boroughs. Unemployment rates at 4.4 per cent is above the London average. Some areas experience high levels of deprivation, with the south of the borough generally more deprived than the north, with the North Circular Road separating the two. Nearly one quarter of unemployed people are classed as long term unemployed compared to 15.4 per cent in London. Brent is the 53rd most deprived borough in England according to the Government's 2007 Indices of Multiple Deprivation. Five neighbourhoods fall within the top 10 per cent most deprived in the UK, these being South Kilburn, St Raphael's/Brentfield, Stonebridge, Harlesden, and Church End. Extensive funding including neighbourhood renewal funding (NRF) and New Deal initiatives are used in these priority wards to support regeneration.
- 16 Over 130 languages are spoken with Gujerati, Hindi, Punjabi, Somali and Urdu the main community languages. The mobility of the borough is increasing and up to eight per cent of residents are refugees or asylum-seekers. There are fewer older people resident in Brent compared to national averages, 15 per cent of the population is aged 65 years and over compared to 20.7 per cent nationally.
- 17 Almost a quarter of residents are under 19 years old but, within the five renewal neighbourhoods, one third of residents are under 16 years old, compared with the London average of one fifth. Over a third of Brent's children live in low-income households in receipt of council tax benefit and free school meals. Nearly a quarter live in social housing and a fifth in single-adult households.
- 18 The average household size in Brent is 2.6, the second highest in London and 23.9 per cent of Brent's households are classified as overcrowded, the fourth highest in London. Significantly almost half of Brent's population live in flats, which are either purpose built or conversions. This has implications for the collection of waste from households in terms of accessibility and space, with the development of separate kerbside collections for recyclables being difficult to implement.
- 19 Brent has the third lowest level of car ownership of all the outer London boroughs. There are 37,372 households in Brent that do not have access to a car, which is 37 per cent of the borough's households.

- 20 Brent has 8,000 local businesses which make an important contribution to the local economy. The Wembley regeneration project, is presenting further opportunities for long-term employment, especially within the retail, leisure and hospitality industries, and stimulated thousands of new affordable homes, as well as facilities, retail and office space. Major improvements have also been made to transport links at Wembley Park and Wembley Stadium stations.

The Council

- 21 Following the May 2006 elections Brent has a joint Liberal Democrat and Conservative Administration. Brent has 63 elected councillors (27 Liberal Democrats, 20 Labour and 16 Conservatives) and an Executive of ten councillors, with six Liberal Democrats and four Conservatives.
- 22 In November 2006, the Executive agreed a four year Corporate Strategy setting out its proposals to deliver its ambition for high quality public services which are relevant to local needs and improve quality of life of those people who live and work in Brent. Improving the performance of public services and addressing disadvantage and inequality through effective governance and local partnership working are central to the administration's strategic and operational objectives.
- 23 The Council's corporate management team consists of the Chief Executive and six directors. For 2007/08, the Council has an overall revenue budget of £242.9 million.
- 24 The priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy are aimed at making Brent:
- a great place – a safe place, a clean place, a green place, and a lively place;
 - a borough of opportunity – local employment and enterprise, health and wellbeing, help when people need it; and
 - one community – settled homes, early excellence, civic leadership, community engagement, and building capacity.
- 25 The Council's improvement programme includes targeted action to address performance in areas which are particular priorities for various reasons, such as especially challenging performance targets or because they are undergoing significant change. Waste, recycling and streetcare services are an identified priority area due to the significant challenges presented by having to deal with growing volumes of household waste in a sustainable manner and achieve higher rates of recycling.

National context

- 26 The Government has set statutory performance standards for local authorities to reduce the amount of waste they collect and to encourage more recycling. Brent Council was set a target standard of 18 per cent for its combined recycling and composting rate by 2005/06 and 20 per cent by 2007/08. The '*Waste Strategy for England 2007*' (May 2007) includes more stretching targets than the previous waste strategy published in 2000, which all Councils have to respond to. The national targets are at least 40 per cent of household waste recycled or composted by 2010, rising to 50 per cent by 2020.

- 27 The EU Landfill Directive requires, amongst other things, that by 2010, the amount of biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill must be reduced to 75 per cent of the total produced in 1995. By 2013, the amount must be reduced to 50 per cent of the 1995 total, and by 2020, to 35 per cent. The amount of biodegradable waste going to landfill is controlled by a tradable allowance system. This provides an increasingly powerful financial incentive for authorities to minimise waste sent to landfill. An increase in the landfill tax escalator by £8 per tonne per year from 2008 until at least 2010/11 was announced in the 2007 budget. This will double tax from £24 to £48. Brent currently landfills around 100,000 tonnes of waste per year.
- 28 The Mayor of London's '*Municipal Waste Management Strategy - Rethinking Rubbish in London*' (September 2003) also guides the work of London boroughs on waste. The Mayor's vision for waste in London is that by 2020, municipal waste should no longer compromise London's future as a sustainable city.
- 29 Councils have a duty to keep their land clear of litter and the Environmental Protection Act 1990 gives local authorities' powers to deal with litter-based problems affecting their areas. These include issuing fixed penalty notices to people who commit an offence by dropping litter. A Code of Practice, issued under the Act, recommends a 'clean as necessary' approach and specific levels of cleanliness for various environments. Under the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, an authority has the power to issue a notice to a private landowner to clean up their land and to undertake the cleansing itself if the landowner fails to act. The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005 further strengthens councils' legislative powers for keeping their areas clean.
- 30 Councils are expected to support the UK sustainable development strategy, '*Securing the Future*' 2005 and many local authorities are at the forefront of efforts to achieve greater social, economic and environmental sustainability. Councils are expected to use their powers as planning, housing and waste collection authorities, as well as their general wellbeing powers and community leadership, to achieve sustainable development. This includes working with others to promote energy conservation and efficiency, protect wildlife habitats and promote biodiversity, reduce and mitigate climate change and promote more sustainable patterns of development.

The Council's Waste Management service

- 31 Brent Council is a Waste Collection Authority and is responsible for:
- refuse collection;
 - special collections such as bulky household waste and clinical waste;
 - recycling and composting collection and facilities;
 - waste education and awareness initiatives;
 - street cleaning;

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- removal of fly-tipping, fly-posting, abandoned vehicles, graffiti and dog waste; and
- enforcement for waste and litter offences.

32 Most of the Council's waste services are delivered through the StreetCare Unit, comprising the following sections.

- Environmental Management:
 - StreetScene, including abandoned vehicles, tree management and grass verge management;
 - Waste Services, including waste contract management, StreetCare Ward Officers (waste contract monitoring, environmental monitoring, resident and councillor liaison), enforcement; and
 - Waste Policy, including resident and school education work on recycling and Envirocrimes, recycling bank management, housing estate recycling facilities development.
- Control Operations, including graffiti cleansing, gully cleansing, highway operations, CCTV, 24/7 emergency control room (of these only graffiti is covered by this inspection).
- Service Development, including performance reporting, community development, consultation, management systems development, policy support.
- Management Support, including administrative support, IT systems development.

33 The waste collection service is delivered in the following ways:

- emptying rubbish bins once a week from 106,569, domestic properties;
- a kerbside collection service for residents with a green organic bin for food waste, organic waste and cardboard (60,000 properties);
- a kerbside collection service for residents with biodegradable sacks (for households with no room for a green organic bin) for organic garden waste only;
- a kerbside collection service for residents with green boxes for dry recyclables (paper, glass, food and drinks cans, plastic bottles, textiles, shoes, batteries and engine oil) (available to 80,000 properties which includes a large proportion of properties converted into flats);
- approximately 120 recycling bring banks across the borough for glass, metals, plastic bottles and paper;
- approximately 260 'recycling frames' of green bins for block of flats or housing estates (around half of all estates have these) for paper, metals and plastic bottles, glass bottles and jars;
- mini recycling centres in schools (almost all);

- a reuse and recycling site (run by the West London Waste Authority - West Waste) for residents to get rid of their bulky waste and other household recyclable and compostable waste;
 - a service for the collection of furniture and electrical items; and
 - subsidised home composters costing £5.
- 34** A new contract for waste management came into effect in April 2007, integrating for the first time refuse collection, recycling and street-cleaning. Brent Council does not operate a commercial waste service.
- 35** The street cleaning service operates from 6am to 10pm, seven days a week, with the contract requiring town centres to be kept free from litter and rubbish between 7am and 10pm every day and residential areas swept three times a week.
- 36** The service is operated through the contractor's 'village' approach, using mini-depots in seven locations in the borough, and there is a streetcare officer for each of the 21 wards.
- 37** The Council works in partnership with the West Waste and its constituent boroughs on waste management. A Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy was adopted in 2005, which identifies how waste collection systems and disposal systems across the six boroughs will contribute to medium and long-term national landfill diversion targets. West Waste has councillors from each partner council on its board.
- 38** The StreetCare service employs 123 'full time equivalent' staff directly, and the general StreetCare budget is £26.49 million for 2007/08 (which excludes a dedicated Parking account worth £11 million). The contract cost for domestic refuse, recycling and street cleaning amounts to approximately half of this figure.

How good is the service?

What has the service aimed to achieve?

- 39 StreetCare services have a clear role to play in helping the Council achieve its vision for Brent of being a prosperous and lively borough, full of opportunity and welcoming to all, a place that will thrive for generations to come, whose future will be determined by local people.
- 40 The services aim to contribute to all three key Council priorities set out in the Corporate Strategy referred to in the previous section, but particularly making Brent 'a great place - safe, clean and green and lively'. This translates into:

A clean place:

- providing clean, well-designed and cared for streets and open spaces so that people feel good about the areas in which they live and work;
- preventing a few people from spoiling the environment for everyone else and raising standards fast enough to keep up with expectations;
- creating welcoming streets and open spaces;
- providing a dedicated StreetCare officer for every ward;
- increasing the standard of cleanliness across the borough, reducing the gap in standards of cleanliness between neighbourhoods, raising performance to exceed that of neighbouring boroughs; and
- tackling envirocrime such as graffiti, dumped rubbish and abandoned cars.

A green place:

- protecting the environment;
 - promoting recycling and waste reduction in local schools and communities;
 - seeking ways to provide the most inaccessible properties with a suitable door step recycling collection service;
 - development programmes have enthusiastically embraced the green agenda with renovation works that are increasingly sustainable in both design and construction, actively encouraging the use of renewable and energy efficient resources that minimise waste; and
 - work with local people to protect the environment, promote environmentally sustainable practices including reducing the amount of waste the borough sends to landfill, encouraging recycling and greater biodiversity and minimising the contribution to climate change.
- 41 To help the service achieve these broad objectives a number of specific targets have been set. Those for 206/07 and 2007/08 are set out in Appendix 1.

- 42 In 2005 the Council consulted residents to assess their attitudes and levels of satisfaction and this informed the priorities for the 2006-2010 corporate strategy. One of the key findings was that crime (at 57 per cent of respondents) was their top priority, followed by cleaner streets (44 per cent).
- 43 The Council has objectives for reducing the amount of waste it creates and increasing the amount recycled and aspires to produce zero waste. These are supported by the following targets to be achieved by April 2011:
- 100 per cent of suitable Council sites to have access to recycling;
 - in buildings with a recycling scheme 60 per cent of waste, on average, to be sent for recycling; and
 - reduction in its 2005-2006 waste base-line by 20 per cent.
- 44 The Council aspires to make Brent an exemplar for environmental practice and performance on sustainability issues. The Council adopted a Carbon management strategy and implementation plan in June 2007 which committed the Council to a target of reducing its carbon production by 20 per cent by 2011 and to supporting 38 different initiatives across the Council. In September 2007 the Council agreed to develop a climate change strategy and sustainability is one of the Council's top four priorities for the period up to 2010.
- 45 The Council is consulting on a draft Waste Policy document to ensure it has a clear policy framework against which it can assess future developments and needs for waste. Once this is approved in early 2008, the Council will be reviewing its Municipal Waste Management Strategy 2006, to ensure it is aligned with the new policy. Two key aspects of the policy include the implementation of compulsory recycling and adopting the 'Zero Waste' policy framework³.

Is the service meeting the needs of the local community and users?

Access, customer care and user focus

- 46 Residents and other customers have a wide range of methods for easily accessing services. Telephone calls are taken through the corporate call centre; and customers can report issues and make complaints, on-line using web-forms, by email, mail and in person at Council receptions.
- 47 Call centre staff have detailed waste procedures which are routinely updated to reflect service changes, such as the recent introduction of charging for bulky waste. However, some service users report inconsistencies in the advice given and interpretation of Council waste policies by staff. Good awareness of service standards and policies by staff is essential to ensure the public are given the right advice about what to do with their waste.

³ Zero Waste Policy, as defined in the 'One Planet Living' approach promoted by DEFRA in the Waste Strategy for England 2007, and devised by campaign groups Bioregional and WWF.

- 48 In October 2007, the Council undertook a survey of StreetCare service users which showed generally good levels of satisfaction. Of the 300 respondents, the overall level of satisfaction with the service provided was 72 per cent. Satisfaction was particularly high for the time taken to respond fully to their matter (99 per cent); the politeness (96 per cent) and helpfulness of staff (92 per cent); the quality and accuracy of the information or advice given (both 85 per cent) and how easy it was to find out whom to contact (97 per cent said very or fairly easy). The service has also successfully retained its Charter Mark award in 2007 which requires maintenance of customer focused services. Staff are therefore clearly focused on delivering appropriate, relevant and responsive services.
- 49 The StreetCare service publishes new service standards each time there is a change in service, following consultation with residents. The website has comprehensive information about the service, such as recycling services, collection days, how to access services as well as service standards. A new service booklet incorporating updated service standards is being produced which incorporates recent changes, such as same day collections, and takes account of the findings of the recent review of waste communications, including explanation of the financial implications of not reducing waste.
- 50 The service engages effectively with local people to ensure they contribute to service design and delivery and to improve the quality of the local environment. Through the established Streetwatchers scheme, 170 volunteer residents report local problems on the streets and contribute to protecting and improving the environment. They have quarterly network meetings, an annual conference and a regular newsletter. Streetwatchers have also assessed the web pages for the service and fed into recent improvements such as easier navigation.
- 51 The service supports and encourages residents to help meet its objectives for recycling and sustainability. An example is the Green Zone trial project in September 2007, which was delivered by a local resident. It involved 33 households in a street in Kensal Green, receiving environmental education and resulted in an increased recycling participation rate as well as commitment to further changes in environmental behaviour, such as water conservation and sustainable travel plans. The Council has undertaken a review to consider how it might expand this resident inspired and led initiative to other areas.
- 52 The service has a variety of methods for consulting and engaging users and residents which helps to ensure that it meets the needs of the community. Staff attend the five area consultative forums and residents association meetings. There is an annual survey of the Brent Citizen Panel (of 2,000 local residents) and the monthly Brent Magazine which is distributed to all addresses in the borough is recognised as a key source of information about the service. Good use is made of this publication to promote environmental sustainability through its 'green pages'. Ward newsletters also inform residents about local environmental improvements and refuse vehicles are branded encouraging people to recycle and giving the telephone number for the service.

Diversity

- 53** The service uses equalities impact assessments of services and policies to inform its approach to diversity. An assessment undertaken in 2006 considered the specification for the new contract. One of the issues identified was improving the approach to assisted collections for those people unable to place their bins at the edge of the property. As a result separate lists of properties with assisted collections held have been brought together and a rolling review of the list over a four-year period is in place. However, a more regular review, with satisfaction surveys of those in receipt of such collections could identify further improvements.
- 54** Working closely with the community the needs of those service users with English as an additional language reflects good practice. Service standard leaflets were previously produced in community languages (the main ones being Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Arabic, Farsi and Albanian) and distributed to community groups and temples and via community leaders. Following feedback, leaflets were subsequently produced in community languages with English alongside to aid the learning of English. The service is consulting the local multi-faith forum about how to ensure more effective engagement with people of all faiths, before it launches its new service standards. In line with current advice these will have simple English and illustrations which clearly show what action is required. This will prevent the need for unnecessary multiple translations.
- 55** A couple of areas for development identified by equalities impact assessments remain outstanding. These are ensuring the contractor monitors the ethnicity, gender and disability of its workforce and more consistent monitoring by the Council of customer profiles by ethnicity, age, disability and gender to help meet level 3 of the Equalities Standard for Local Government. This would identify which groups are under represented and what action may be needed, as well as evaluating the effectiveness of policies and practices.

Waste management

- 56** Effectively dealing with the borough's waste is one of the Council's top priorities and despite the improvements made, it remains a key challenge. The Council met its statutory recycling target for 2005/06, (achieving 20.01 per cent against a target of 18 per cent). The combined rate of recycling and composting, at 21.52 per cent for 2006/07, is middle CPA threshold (and worst quartile) performance of waste collection authorities. The Council's performance data for the end of quarter 2 of 2007/08 shows the recycling rate as just under 25 per cent, above its statutory target for 2007/08 of 20 per cent. Residents and streetwatchers fed back to us during the inspection that refuse collection and recycling services had clearly improved over the past year.
- 57** In general, the performance of the waste management service according to the latest available comparative performance indicator data shows the Council has not kept pace with good performing services. A number of indicators remain in the worst quartile and the lower CPA threshold for 2006/2007 (see Appendix 1). Satisfaction with waste collection is in the middle threshold (second quartile), but satisfaction with recycling remains in the lower threshold (worst quartile).

- 58 The Council's has had limited success in minimising the amount of waste collected. Initiatives to encourage waste minimisation, such as promotion of composting and washable nappies, and reducing junk mail have been used, but evaluation of their impact on waste levels has not been consistent. In 2006/07, 411.2 kg of waste was collected per household placing it in the middle threshold (second quartile) for performance. However, this was almost the same level as for the previous year (412 kg). A year on year reduction in the waste collected is necessary to achieve the Council's aspirations for zero waste.
- 59 The Council's progress in reducing its own waste has been slow. In 2006/07, Council staff recycled 291 tonnes of waste. Although this was a 65 per cent increase on the previous year, the Council is still recycling less than a fifth of all the waste produced by its buildings and only 30 per cent of the buildings it occupies are part of its internal recycling scheme. Effectively tackling its own waste stream and promoting its achievements sets an example to local people.
- 60 There is some inequality in the provision for recycling, a particular problem for the Council due to the nature of its housing stock. For 2006/07, 91.5 per cent of households were served by kerbside collection (for two recyclables) (BV91 (b) which is worst quartile (and middle threshold) performance. This increased to 94.65 per cent for the first two quarters of 2007/08. The kerbside dry recycling collection (green box) service is available to 80,000 of the 106,569 properties, which includes a large proportion of properties converted into flats. However, not all households have it and the Council estimates that the participation rate is less than 50 per cent. The Council does not have a comprehensive analysis of which households are not participating, although an audit is planned. Without this the Council will not be able to effectively target publicity around recycling.
- 61 The Council has made less progress in recycling provision for residents living in flats on estates or in blocks, and especially those living above shops. The Council has focused on expanding its provision for estates, with communal recycling facilities (estate frames) provided to approximately one half of all housing estates. An audit of remaining estates has been undertaken using Waste & Resources Action Programme (WRAP) funding with un-serviced estates scheduled to be completed by the end of March 2008. The Council has also sought to address the lack of access to recycling for those without communal facilities, or those without a car, by retaining its bulky waste collection service and expanding its network of recycling banks. With 120 bring banks across the borough most people live within 125 metres of one.
- 62 The service actively seeks to improve take up of recycling by under represented groups, but acknowledges that this needs to be scaled up. The Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Recycling Campaign in 2006, focused on the Hindu Indian and Somalian communities who typically have a low level of participation in recycling. The initiative involved an education campaign and door knocking in 55 streets in the Wembley/Tokington area, using information in different languages. As a result in the targeted areas participation rates increased from 34.5 per cent to 37.2 per cent. Employing a more strategic approach on an ongoing basis has the potential to deliver consistently higher rates of recycling.

- 63 Problems with contamination of organic green bins have been a persistent problem but the Council has taken effective action to reduce this. Areas with high contamination rates have been targeted with leaflets and stickers placed on bins. Over 2,500 contaminated bins have been removed and the bin is only returned when residents sign an agreement card for the correct use of the bin. By November 2007, over 300 bins had been returned to residents. The Council provides bio-sacks for residents whose properties cannot accommodate green bins, although these do not take kitchen waste or cardboard.
- 64 The reliability of the refuse and recycling service has been inconsistent. Major service changes introduced during 2007 had a considerable impact on the number of missed collections of bins. At the start of the new contract in April 2007, there were over 200 missed bins (all types) for every 100,000 collections, against a target of 40. This was largely due to new staff being unfamiliar with recycling rounds. It peaked again at 167 following the introduction of same day collections in October 2007, but has subsequently been brought down again. At the time of the inspection there were 53 missed bins per 100,000 collected, below the Council's performance target.
- 65 Engagement with businesses remains a key challenge for the Council as it attempts to divert trade waste from the municipal waste stream. There have been a number of initiatives aimed at involving business but there has generally been a poor level of take up for example in time-banding collections. In a recent initiative street watchers were supported in challenging companies about excessive packaging, but otherwise work in this area with businesses dates back to 2001. The service recognises the importance of engaging businesses in the borough to encourage minimisation, reuse and recycling of trade waste, but the impact of its activities have been limited.
- 66 The service's enforcement activity has increased but there is limited strategic direction and coordination for enforcement. The main focus of enforcement is on ensuring businesses have trade waste contracts and there have been over 30 successful prosecutions since 2005. There are links to other regulatory services such as environmental health and examples of joint initiatives with other agencies, such as enforcement blitzes and 'alleygater' schemes to reduce dumping of waste. However, enforcement activity is not informed by a long term strategic approach to ensure the most effective use of resources.
- 67 The Council works well with schools to increase recycling, but evaluation of the impact of this work is inconsistent. There are recycling facilities in 75 of the 87 schools and 50 schools have green bins for organic waste. The service also has an ongoing programme of environmental education in schools, delivering presentations on recycling and providing an environmental and recycling information pack. This has mainly been focused in primary schools, with 45 visited in 2006/07. The service has not assessed its work with schools and take up of waste audits has been minimal. The service also attempted to implement a young streetwatcher scheme but this did not secure the necessary funding. Exploiting further opportunities for shaping service design around young people, for example through the youth parliament, is particularly important given the age profile of the population and the challenging recycling targets.

24 Waste Management | How good is the service?

- 68 The reuse and recycling centre at Twyford is accessible, clean, tidy and well kept and has clear signage. The centre is owned and run by West Waste and Brent uses it under an agency agreement and is open from 8am to 4pm daily. In 2006/07 the centre had a recycling rate of 78 per cent (or 66 per cent excluding inert materials), which a recent survey highlighted is the highest in London.
- 69 The Contractor is required by the contract to make arrangements, wherever possible, to ensure street cleansing waste is sent for recycling. Street cleaning barrows have separate compartments for this purpose. Approximately 40 tonnes of street cleaning leaves have been recycled in the first half of 2007/08. However, the recycling of detritus which is in the contract has not yet started.

Street cleaning

- 70 The Council has invested in its street cleaning service to make improvements for local residents. The new contract provides a 6am to 10pm service, seven days a week, compared to the old contract which had 8am to 8pm cleaning Monday to - Friday only. During our inspection we found most streets maintained to a decent standard of cleanliness, and residents, streetwatchers and local interest groups we met spoke of the improvements they had experienced in the last year. The level of resident satisfaction with street cleanliness in the borough during 2006/07 was 76 per cent, above the Council's target of 64.6 per cent, and second quartile (Middle threshold) nationally.
- 71 Street cleaning has an emphasis on sweeping rather than litter picking and the redesigned zoning is clearly having a positive impact on standards. Each ward has an officer with responsibility for monitoring all waste management and street cleaning issues. Areas of high footfall, such as around stations, have seen particularly noticeable improvements. The increased frequency of street cleansing also means that sweeping follows refuse and recycling rounds more than previously, which helps prevent problems between services.
- 72 However, there continue to be problems with lower standards in some areas. In Willesden Green, Wembley Central and Kilburn, for example less than 60 per cent of streets met cleanliness standards in the first two quarters of 2007/08. Inconsistencies in the standard of cleaning mean that some local people experience an inferior quality of service.
- 73 During 2006/07, the proportion of streets showing an unacceptable level of litter and detritus as measured by ENCAMS was 32 per cent, below the Council's target of 25 per cent and in the worst quartile nationally. However, the current level of performance, 21.4 per cent (provisional average over the three tranches in 2007/08), shows improvement, supporting the feedback from residents and our own observations.
- 74 Some residents are confused about who to contact about street cleaning issues where land is controlled by different agencies. This is particularly the case on registered social landlord estates and park land. Residents expressed dissatisfaction about being re-directed to other service providers and wanted a single point of contact. These issues have been flagged by surveys and were highlighted again by residents we met.

- 75 Some road channels and boundaries are in a poor condition which hinders effective street cleaning. The Council has identified these areas as impacting on detritus levels and its highways programme includes provision for repair of these.
- 76 Litter bins are appropriately located in high footfall locations such as town centres. These are generally well maintained and emptied frequently. This helps to prevent the build up of litter from overflowing or damaged bins.
- 77 The Council deals with around 1800 fly-tipping incidents each quarter and in July 2007, DEFRA assessed the Council's performance in dealing with fly-tipping as good. In 2006/07, the average time taken to remove fly-tips met the target of less than a day. However, performance for the first two quarters of 2007/08 has dipped to 1.27 days.
- 78 The level of graffiti is a key concern of local people and comparative performance in 2006/07 was in the worst quartile nationally. This survey identified an unacceptable level of graffiti visible from one fifth of land and highways. This reduced to 16 per cent for the first quarter of 2007/08 which is still some way off the Council's target of 7 per cent. A multi-agency project board has been established to tackle this problem in a coordinated manner.
- 79 Comparative performance in terms of fly-posting incidents was in the worst quartile nationally in 2006/07. The Council's performance for quarter 2 of 2007/08 shows improvement over the last six months with a reduction from 3 to 1 per cent in unacceptable levels of fly-posting. This is within the Council's target of 1.5 per cent and our reality checks did not highlight a significant problem with fly-posting.
- 80 Residents have a low level concern about abandoned cars according to the 2006/07 BVPI user survey. Only 20 per cent consider this to be a very or fairly big problem, significantly below the level in 2003/04 (54.4 per cent). The Council's contractor removes just under 98 per cent of abandoned vehicles within 24 hours which contributes to people's perception of standards of cleanliness.

Environmental sustainability

- 81 The Council has set a clear strategic framework for environmental sustainability. It has a longstanding commitment to the environment, having adopted its first corporate environmental policy in 1999 (reviewing it in 2005). It has also had a biodiversity action plan since 2001. One of the top three priorities of the Council in the corporate strategy is 'Brent - a great place - safe, clean and green and lively' and beneath this sit objectives and targets set out in the previous section. In June 2007, the Council adopted a Carbon Management Strategy and implementation plan which sets a carbon production reduction target of 20 per cent by 2011. A climate change strategy is also in development.
- 82 Over 2,200 residents, businesses and Council staff have signed up to a Community Pledge to keep their land free from environmental crime (litter, rubbish, graffiti, fly-posting and dog fouling), maintain their gardens and report environmental crimes to the Council. This encourages the community and staff to adapt their lifestyles to protect the environment and reduce their impact on climate change.

- 83 Planning powers are used to promote sustainability. A planning guide for householders and developers gives advice on sustainable design, construction and pollution control. This informs residents and developers how to save energy and money; reduce waste and reduce the amount of water used; among other environmental advice. Although supplementary planning guidance (SPG 19) on sustainable development dates back to 2003 it is supported by a sustainable development checklist. This helps to ensure that new developments take account of sustainability principals through challenging submissions.

Is the service delivering value for money?

- 84 The Council has a clear focus on seeking to minimise its costs and has recently market tested the service to deliver better value for money from the new contract which started in April 2007. Overall, however, costs for both street cleaning and refuse collection remain high in comparison to the performance achieved, according to the Audit Commission's latest value for money profiles and best value performance data.
- 85 Waste and recycling services were market tested in 2006 using a robust procurement process. The Council adopted the new EU Competitive Dialogue procedure which delivered final tenders up to £1 million per year less than the prices quoted at the initial dialogue stage. The resultant contract has a higher quality specification for the service, with an improved standard of street cleaning extended to cover the weekend; expanding recycling provision; and same day collections for all waste and recycling services, at a competitive price.
- 86 As can be seen from the table at Appendix 1, the cost of waste collection per household (BV86) remains high in comparison to the level of performance achieved. This is partly due to policy decisions, such as the sale of its trade waste function, and partly due to lower performance leading to less income from recycling credits. Excluding the costs of waste disposal from the collection costs, would reduce its figure for BV86 by approximately one fifth, but this would still represent worst quartile performance for 2006/07. Although there have been gradual improvements since the start of the new contract in street cleaning, recycling and refuse collection, performance remains below average.
- 87 The Council recognises the need to significantly improve its diversion of waste from landfill to minimise rising landfill costs, but there has not been a sustained reduction in tonnages landfilled, as Appendix 1 shows. The Council estimates that there is a £53.50 saving on every tonne diverted from landfill and is working with its strategic partner to identify ways to increase recycling - particularly the green box (dry recyclable) scheme and yield efficiency savings. The implementation of compulsory recycling is seen by the Council as the main driver to reducing residual waste.
- 88 The Council has supported the improvement of the service by ensuring that external funding secured by the service is ring-fenced. Waste performance and efficiency grant funding of £313,000 revenue and the same figure for capital has been used for running costs and to fund IT developments and additional green boxes, bring bank containers and litter and residual waste bins.

- 89 The introduction of ward based working for the Council and the contractor's staff has presented opportunities for more efficient ways of working, as well as greater awareness of local issues and concerns. However, the service has not undertaken a robust analysis to assess the impact on costs and performance to evaluate value for money. For example, each ward currently has a dedicated ward officer and yet the level of work involved varies significantly between wards. The Council is aware of this and is considering redirecting staff resources into enforcement roles for a trial period to help ensure trade waste is diverted from the municipal waste stream, to reduce disposal costs.
- 90 Dealing with trade waste in the municipal waste stream remains a key challenge for the Council. As Brent does not have a trade waste service it has little control over the collection of this waste, relying on enforcement of the waste duty of care using section 34 notices. The Council's waste and recycling contractor has a significant share of the local trade waste market but a joint approach to tackling trade waste in the domestic waste stream has not been developed. A project to engage trade waste contractors in time-banding their collections to minimise the amount of waste on the streets was also unsuccessful. Initiatives such as this and use of different coloured bags for trade waste could have a potentially significant impact in reducing landfill disposal costs.
- 91 At a section level there are examples of some improvements in efficiency, such as the merging of environmental health and StreetCare teams in the contact centre. However, the process for setting efficiency targets and monitoring to ensure delivery is not consistent. The service has also not systematically tracked the impact of investment and service changes, particularly in those areas of the service provided in house.
- 92 The new contract does not specifically include a requirement for the contractor to make annual efficiency savings in line with Gershon targets, although this was discussed during the competitive dialogue phase. However, the contract includes other financial provisions, including a basket of indicators, covering staff, transport and fuel costs, which is used to determine the payment level for the contract. The contract also includes an agreed financial incentive for both the Council and its service partner if recycling levels exceed an agreed level of income for the materials captured. This helps to provide a continued focus on a shared approach to delivering value for money.
- 93 Aside from the new integrated waste contract, there have been few outcomes from joint procurement and working with partners to improve value for money. There have been discussions with West neighbouring boroughs about recycling provision, for example, for businesses at the Park Royal Industrial Estate. This led to a food waste scheme, but an initiative to introduce a more extensive reuse and recycling facility in the area has stalled.

- 94 The establishment of a multi-agency graffiti project board is bringing together StreetCare, Brent Housing Partnership, Community Safety, Anti-Social Behaviour Teams, Met Police and Transport Police to determine a more coordinated, preventive approach to graffiti management. This could also provide a useful forum for developing joint approaches for other enforcement and waste issues, such as fly-tipping and trade waste. However as this board has only just been established there are few outcomes as yet.
- 95 The approach to budget forecasting and generating income is a weakness and this is identified in the 2007/08 StreetCare service plan. At the time of the inspection, the Council's income target of £275,000 for bulky waste collection (following the introduction of a £25 charge in July 2007), was showing a substantial projected shortfall at the year end (£215,000) due to a significant downturn in demand for the service. Concessions are still available, for example, pensioners receive a free service and all households are entitled to one free collection of a fridge or freezer each year. However, the shortfall means savings will need to be identified elsewhere which could impact on delivery of service objectives.
- 96 The impact of charging for bulky waste on levels of fly-tipping has also not been fully evaluated. The service's own data suggests no rise in the incidence of fly-tipping on the highway in the 3 months following the charge's introduction (remaining at about 600 incidents per month). However, the number of fly-tipping incidents in alleyways rose from 45 to 109. Some residents feel that more front gardens have waste accumulating in them. The clear all policy and frequency of street cleaning could also mean that accumulations are being routinely cleared without persistent perpetrators being challenged by enforcement officers. This means that the Council cannot clearly demonstrate whether the change represents value for money.
- 97 The service considers value for money alongside environmental impacts. For example, the 38 projects in the Carbon management strategy have been costed; renewable and green energy have been investigated; and there are some instances of greener options being adopted. There is monitoring of electricity on each floor in the town hall and a drive to turn off PCs overnight which demonstrate the Council's commitment to reducing costs and improving environmental performance.
- 98 The Council has achieved a good level of payment for the fixed penalty notices (FPNs) it issues. The average payment level for FPNs since May 2004 is 82.1 per cent, compared with the national average rate of 72.4 per cent. Most notices issued are for failing to produce waste documents (over 300 for in 2006/07). The Council met its LAA target for issuing duty of care notices in 2006/07, which will contribute to the reward grant. However it has issued relatively few FPNs for littering offences (34 in 2006/07). Fines encourage people not to litter or fly-tip and are therefore a key tool in achieving cleaner streets. Income generated can also be made available to fund further enforcement, although the Council does not currently ring-fence it in this way.

What are the prospects for improvement to the service?

What is the service track record in delivering improvement?

- 99** The Council has implemented major service changes that have brought about considerable improvements for service users. The start of the new contract and the move to a single day collection scheme for all three waste streams: the green box, organic waste and residual waste, have after short periods, where performance dipped, delivered improvements in terms of: recycling rates, the cleanliness of the streets and the level of satisfaction expressed by residents.
- 100** A full re-zoning exercise undertaken as part of the contract specification has led to improved standards of cleaning. Streets that had been difficult to keep clean under the previous arrangements, namely in town centres and industrial areas are now subject to a more frequent cleaning regime. For example, it had been a longstanding problem keeping the streets clean on the Park Royal industrial estate, but this area is now cleaned 7 days a week, leading to a significant reduction in the amount of detritus accumulating on streets in this area.
- 101** The inequalities that exist in terms of recycling provision are steadily being addressed and the introduction of new tools and facilities are helping to improve recycling rates. For example:
- the Green box service has been extended to serve several additional streets since the start of the new contract;
 - recycling provision is being made available to households living on estates within the borough, and to the 580 households whose properties are directly adjacent the North Circular;
 - the use of split barrows now allows staff to segregate clean and dry recyclable waste from non-recyclable waste as they clean the streets; and
 - through the introduction of Tetra pak/juice cartons (a new material stream for the Council) at bring bank sites in five supermarkets.
- 102** By providing extra facilities, and the means to recycle additional materials, and introducing new equipment the service has improved its recycling performance.
- 103** The service has made adequate progress in implementing the recommendations from the last Audit Commission inspection in 2003. While some actions have been completed such as targeted work with particular communities to improve recycling participation rates, and use of a new of vehicles, a number of recommendations have not been fully implemented. These were highlighted in internal audit report dated April 2007 and some remain outstanding, including implementing an internal recycling plan and development of minimisation programmes. The service has subsequently put in place a schedule of reviews to address the outstanding areas.

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- 104** The published Best Value performance indicator data for the three years to 2006/07 (the latest available audited data, see Appendix 1) shows that the service has a track record of improvement across a range of performance measures. For example:
- the combined recycling and composting rates have risen from 13.95 to 21.52 per cent;
 - household waste collection in terms of kilograms per head has improved, reducing from 438.5 to 411.2 kilograms;
 - the percentage of households served by kerbside collection of one recyclable material has risen from 81.3 to 91.5 per cent; and
 - the percentage of land littered to a significant or heavy extent has fallen from 34 to 32 per cent.
- 105** Resident's satisfaction with the service has also improved, although this is still comparatively low for recycling. Between 2003/04 and 2006/07 the level of satisfaction has risen for each of the service areas covered by the best value survey. Satisfaction with waste collection has improved from 72 to 81 per cent; with recycling (adjusted for deprivation) it has increased from 58 to 63 per cent; and with cleanliness of public spaces (adjusted for deprivation) it has risen from 62 to 76 per cent.
- 106** The level of recycling has improved steadily over the past three years. The combined recycling rate has improved to 24.79 per cent (13.72 per cent for recycling and 11.07 per cent for composting) as at July-September 2007. In the corresponding period three years ago it was 12.58 per cent (7.68 per cent for recycling and 4.9 per cent for composting). The amount of waste collected has also declined from 118.4 to 106.59 kilograms per head and the proportion of households with access to kerbside collection has also increased from 78.35 to 93.7 per cent.
- 107** Adequate improvement has been made in the level of litter and detritus. Performance has been slightly erratic over the last three years, but the overall trend is a positive one. The most recent data supplied by the Council shows that the percentage of streets with an unacceptable levels of litter or detritus has improved from 31 to 24 per cent from 2004 to 2007 (for July to September period). However, the DEFRA target for councils of no more than 25 per cent by 2005/06 was not met.
- 108** The Council's own annual satisfaction survey shows residents' net satisfaction with the service to be 72 per cent at November 2007, with year on year improvement since 2004. It was 70 per cent in 2006, 67 per cent in 2005 and 58 per cent in 2004. Customer satisfaction with access to the service has also shown a track record of improvement. In 2004/05, 88 per cent of customers found it very or fairly easy to get in touch with the right person in StreetCare. By 2006/07, this had risen to 98 per cent.

- 109** The three year trend in the number of missed bins has been adequate, with temporary but significant dips in performance when service changes have been made. The number of missed bins for household waste, excluding green box collections, was 81 missed bins per 100,000 households in 2004 between July to September and 60.69 in the same period of 2007. However, this is still over the service's target of 50 bins or less per 100,000 collections.
- 110** The service has increased its level of enforcement activity. The number of duty of care inspections rose from 1105 to 2188 between 2005/06 and 2006/07. The number of formal cautions rose from 25 to 38, and the number of prosecutions rose from 25 to 192 over the same period. By increasing the level of enforcement the service is helping to deter future fly-tipping and encourage more responsible disposal of waste. Performance as measured by the number of complaints received about the service shows good progress. The number of complaints has dropped consistently since 2005/06 when there were 621, to 348 in 2006/07.

How well does the service manage performance?

- 111** The StreetCare service has a clear service plan setting out what it wants to achieve in 2007/08. It details the service's key objectives and the links with the corporate strategy and other local and national drivers. Critical performance indicators are shown, each with targets set for the next three years. Longer term pressures on the unit are highlighted and action plans for achieving service improvements detailed. These detail links to service objectives, actions required, the intended outcomes and responsibility for delivery, as well as a date for completion. Through the production of clear plans the service is more likely to be better prepared to deliver its objectives and meet future challenges.
- 112** The service plan cascades from the corporate plan and appropriately focuses on those issues that need to be addressed. These include plugging the gaps in service provision on housing estates, reducing the number of missed bins, diverting waste arising, as well as working more closely with businesses.
- 113** StreetCare's plans and delivery requirements are effectively linked into other departments' plans, guidance and strategies and are subjected to peer challenge. Existing and proposed planning guidance gives due consideration to sustainability and waste management issues. For example, the space that needs to be made available in new developments to produce an adequate and attractive area for storage of waste and recyclable material.
- 114** Similarly, a good understanding of StreetCare requirements is show in terms of the Council's transport capital programme. This considers the issues and areas that give rise to street cleansing problems. To ensure these problems are not replicated in the future, information has been fed into a draft Public Realm Design Guide. This document will provide guidance on what materials should be used to aid cleansing and reduce the level of maintenance required. The transport team have also provided information on the load bearing capacity of pavements to ensure the choice of mechanical sweeper is appropriate. Sharing information in this way between services helps to ensure the aim of a cleaner and more durable urban environment is achieved.

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- 115** Plans give due consideration to all of the players in the waste chain, namely business, retailers, consumers, local authorities and the waste management industry. Options to assist each partner are also being developed. By appreciating the contribution each partner can make and providing targeted support the Council will be better placed to ensure combined resources are appropriately directed to deliver the community objectives.
- 116** The service has also implemented appropriate projects to address key service weaknesses. For example, the effectiveness of the mixed bag collection being used to provide recycling services to households living directly on the North Circular is to be evaluated. This will then inform development of a similar model for flats above shops which may not have access to door step recycling.
- 117** The council has reviewed the recycling performance on estates to determine future provision. Of the three main collection approaches; door-to-door; chute recycling systems; and bring-banks, door-to-door collection systems collect the greatest amount of recyclables, with bring sites the least. The service has costed these various options and door-to-door collection would require significant additional investment and so in the short-term the service aims to enhance the use of the existing bring-banks. A trial is planned to assess the viability of alternative collection schemes. By gaining a robust understanding of the effectiveness of various collection methods, coupled with a commitment to pilot new arrangements, the service is well placed to ensure its approach will be effective.
- 118** In the light of previous work a policy support officer has been assigned the task of building on the BME project with a Phase II programme to again support particular communities with appropriately tailored and targeted assistance. By acknowledging one approach does not work in every situation and adopting a targeted approach the service is much more likely to achieve its aim of encouraging greater participation rates amongst all sections of the community.
- 119** The current contract is designed to deliver a 30 per cent recycling rate and only after that has been attained will additional resources be considered. However, this no longer fits with the more recent and tougher national target of 40 per cent. The Council's approach to achieving this more stretching target is to introduce compulsory recycling as the experience of others who have done so is that an increase of around 10 per cent is achievable over two years. This would provide the opportunity for the step change in performance that the Council needs to achieve.
- 120** Through the establishment of clear baselines, the careful trialling of pilot approaches, the targeting of support, and the commitment to make difficult decision such as the introduction of compulsory recycling, the service stands a good chance of achieving its aims.

- 121** The service's improvement plans are clearly linked to residents' wishes. Local people have been consulted about the proposed waste policy. Just under ninety per cent of respondents agreed that the Council should adopt a 'Zero Waste' philosophy, and over three quarters were in favour of compulsory recycling. Virtually all respondents regarded recycling as important to them personally too. This provides the Council with a clear mandate for implementing its tougher approach to tackling waste.
- 122** A Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for West London Waste Authority was been agreed, but its implementation has been delayed due to a legal challenge. The implementation of the Council's waste policy will require Brent to update its own Waste Management Strategy, originally approved by the Executive in February 2006. Re-submission of the strategy to the Executive in the first half of 2008 will be a suitable time to review and update the strategy and will also be six months following the adoption of the waste policy. Regular review of strategies and policies, following consultation, is more likely to achieve the full commitment of partners and the community.
- 123** The service has undertaken appropriate modelling to understand the likely cost implications of alternative waste management approaches, commissioned consultants to undertake an income and charging review and plans to review current service practices to allow resources to be more effectively directed. By seeking appropriate expertise, gaining a robust understanding of alternative approaches through modelling, and being willing to review even relatively recently established structures, the service is well placed to improve the efficiency of the service it provides.
- 124** The StreetCare service is supported by clear and visible leadership at corporate and operational level. Sustainability is a key political priority and is actively supported by engaged councillors. StreetCare services also feature strongly in the LAA under the priority 'Welcoming Streets and Parks - Clean and Green' demonstrating commitment to their improvement. A range of green initiatives, including car club promotion; the green design brief for the proposed new civic centre; the introduction of newspaper banks at station entrances; 'Mr. Bike' surgeries to encourage people to make more use of bicycles; and the carbon strategy are examples of this commitment to address the challenge of achieving a sustainable future. With knowledgeable, engaged and supportive councillors and senior management the service is well placed to ensure that service improvements are delivered for service users.
- 125** The service has held ISO 14001 accreditation for its environmental management system since 2000. The most recent audit in October 2007 did not find any instances of non-conformance. A good range of performance reports are produced, at daily, weekly and monthly intervals for key service performance indicators, such as fly-tipping and missed bins. Reports are also produced that detail the performance being achieved at ward level. Through the adoption of a performance management methodology, such as ISO14001, and adequate reporting arrangements, service managers are able to understand the service's performance and take timely corrective action when necessary.

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- 126 The service shares data and intelligence with other services and partners but there are opportunities to make greater use of other services' information. StreetCare and public calls are mapped on to the Council's geographical information system (GIS) to identify hotspots and identify where to prioritise its alley-gating projects. Similarly, information is shared with partners to try and counter persistent graffiti vandals. However, the StreetCare service has not made full use of the intranet web browser facility that other regulatory services use which identifies all action taken by address. By maximising the sharing of information the Council can benefit from additional intelligence to more effectively target resources.
- 127 A good level of senior manager and councillor scrutiny and monitoring takes place. This is facilitated by holding quarterly performance reviews, using the Council's 'Vital Signs' performance indicators. This information is presented to the Executive, Corporate Management Team as well as the Performance and Finance Select Committee. The service has also benefited from 'high level' monitoring by a corporate group chaired by the Chief Executive to examine performance, and agree improvement plans for waste services. As a result of this senior manager and councillor scrutiny, timely support and direction has been given, even whilst the administration changed in 2006.
- 128 The service's contract monitoring arrangements are generally sound. An adversarial relationship with the contractor has been replaced with more of a partnership approach which is enshrined in the new contract. Contract monitoring and problem resolution makes use of a clear contract hierarchy for issues to be escalated, a performance framework based upon notification points and default notices, and effective corrective action planning.
- 129 When issues or problems arise that need formally managing corrective action plans (CAPs) are drafted and agreed. These address significant failures in the contracted services or set out changes to allow the contractor to deliver services in a more efficient manner outside the contract specifications. These CAPs detail the work required, the responsible person, and a target date for the completion and monitoring responsibilities. They are effectively monitored and where the contractor has not rectified the issue by the date agreed liquidated damages claims have been submitted. There is a clear resolve to solve problems when going through the rectification notices to identify issues that need addressing. Minutes are taken in the form of action points and this has built confidence between the contractor and the Council. CAPs have been used effectively to bring down the rate of missed bins.
- 130 Not all staff are fully conversant with the framework or share a consistent understanding of the service standards. This is highlighted in the ISO14001 audit findings, and was reflected in feedback we received. This is despite the fact that contract monitoring staff and the contractor's staff have been provided with a Contract Manual setting out how the contract is to be monitored and managed. The service aims to hold workshops to provide refresher training on the performance management framework for staff. Unless staff and operatives are aware of the standards expected by the contractor the ability for Council staff to effectively undertake their monitoring role is diminished.

- 131** In line with good practice the service makes use of its network of resident champions, the Streetwatchers to help identify any failings or examples of poor performance. There is also a development programme in place and action is being taken to attract people to the scheme from under represented groups. Using residents in this way supports the Council in managing its performance.
- 132** Data quality in the service is adequate. The accuracy of the data on the 'Average Time Taken to Remove Fly-tips' has been problematic. Performance appeared to have slipped in quarter 2 of 2007/08, to just below the target of 1 day. However, on investigation the poor performance was considered to be due to inaccurate data entry rather than actual performance. Errors in the calculations used to assign points to rectification codes were also incorrect and resulted in an inaccurate picture of performance. Officers have advised that these errors have now been corrected. However, unless data is consistently accurate, management cannot make the right decisions as to how to enhance the service's performance.
- 133** The service is committed to learning from its own and others experiences. Examples include:
- project closure reviews that have highlighted the need for more robust project management arrangements and identified specific training needs;
 - use of consultants, for instance to review how the service was communicating its message on recycling, highlighting the need for more emphasis on face to face and targeted communication;
 - negotiating with the contractor for the appointment of managers with good knowledge of similar services in other Councils; and
 - the Call Centre's Customer Loop service that employs two dedicated staff who call customers one week after they have contacted the service to ask about, the quality of the service they received and any suggestions for improvement.
- 134** By being open, and by systematically evaluating pilots, projects and seeking feedback from customers the service has identified weaknesses and appropriate service improvements in a systematic way.

Does the service have the capacity to improve?

- 135** The service has sufficient capacity to enhance service delivery. This has been achieved through investing in staff, the provision of new tools, the introduction of new IT systems and the adoption of an increasingly flexible and cooperative way of working.

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- 136** Staffing capacity has been increased. This has enabled the service to establish a dedicated waste management and environmental educational team and significantly increased the number of staff employed to monitor contract performance. The number of recycling officers has increased from 4 to 5, team leaders from 2 to 3, and the compliment of street care officers has been increased from 12 to 21. The enforcement team has also increased from 2 to 3 enforcement officers plus a team leader. However, despite this increase, the enforcement team capacity is only adequate. To help address this issue, while we were on site 3 ward officers were in the process of being seconded to the enforcement team until the end of the financial year to assist.
- 137** The new integrated of waste collection and recycling into the one contract allows for greater flexibility in terms of the use and deployment of resources, for example the deployment of intensive street cleaning teams, than under the previous arrangements.
- 138** The service has access to the right tools for the work. New vehicles have been purchased to support the service, although there have been some maintenance and mechanical problems with these vehicles. Additional training has helped alleviate problems with new mechanical sweepers. The Council has provided three of its old vehicles to the contractor until more complex mechanical failings affecting some of the larger vehicles are addressed. There has also been investment in new equipment, barrows, bags, and brooms in support of the new contract. By providing staff with appropriate tools and acting in a flexible and pragmatic fashion the service is well placed to continue to deliver service improvements.
- 139** StreetCare's IT arrangements are adequate. Contractor and Council staff have been provided with mobile technology (PDAs) that enable issues to be captured once. However, the interfaces between the council's information system and the contractor's are still not operating as it had been envisaged. Although this functionality was due to have been available when the contract started in April 2007, it is now not likely to be fully up and running until June 2008. Unless information flows are efficient staff time can be lost unnecessarily chasing for updates that a more efficient system would have provided.
- 140** Council staff are adequately supported in their work with Investors in People (IIP) accreditation held for three years. Departmental performance in terms of employees taking time off sick between July and September 2007 is better than the Council average. Poor performance is adequately managed, with individuals held to account for below standard work. Through tackling under performance and managing sickness absence the service helps to maintain its capacity.

- 141** The tendering of waste and recycling services during 2006 using the EU Competitive Dialogue Procedure has provided the Council with a more relevant service. This allowed selected suppliers to identify and define solutions that meet the Council's requirements. It led to a greater appreciation of how the two contracting parties' arrangements can best be harnessed to deliver the service to the standard desired, as well as identifying opportunities to introduce better ways of working. For example, it was agreed that with the proposed enhanced sweeping regime there was no need to retain an intensive cleaning programme. The contract also offered up new end markets for recycling, although limited progress has been made with mixed plastics. Through the adoption of this process the service has secured a competitively priced contract for the delivery of a higher quality service.
- 142** The Council has a good track record of securing funding from Transport for London (TfL), some of which is used to improve the quality of the streets and the ease with which they can be kept clean. The Council has also successfully secured section 106 planning obligation monies of which some is dedicated to addressing sustainability issues. However, exploration of the potential for private sector sponsorship of waste services is less advanced. For example, sponsored or adopted litter bins outside fast food establishments and schools and award schemes via the local press. Exploiting a wider range of funding sources could enhance the service's capacity for further service developments.

Appendix 1 – BVPI Performance

Performance indicator	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Result	Quartile	Result	Quartile	Result	Quartile / CPA threshold	Unaudited performance
BV82a+b Combined recycling and composting rate	13.95%	Worst quartile	20.01%	Worst quartile	21.52% (Target 22%)	Worst quartile/ Middle threshold	24.78% at September 2007 (Target 25%)
BV84a Household waste collection - kg per head	438.5kg	3rd quartile	412kg	3rd quartile	411.2kg (Target 411kg)	2nd quartile/ Middle threshold	210.59 kg - April to September 2007
BV84b Percentage change from previous year in number of kg of household waste collected per head of household	New	N/A	-6.06%	-	-1.36% (Target -2.9%)	-	Not available (Target -2.3%)
BV86 Cost of waste collections per household	£57.87	Worst quartile	£81.60	Worst quartile	£81.49 (Target £68)	Worst quartile	£80.79 at June 2007 (Target £70)
BV91(a) Percentage of households served by kerbside collection (one recyclable)	81.3%	Worst quartile	91%	Worst quartile	91.5%	Worst quartile	94.65% at September 2007
BV91(b) Percentage of households served by kerbside collection (two recyclable)	-	-	91%	3rd quartile	91.5% (Target 93%)	Worst quartile/ Middle threshold	94.65% at September 2007 (Target 100%)
BV199a Percentage of land littered to a significant or heavy extent	34%	Worst quartile	30%	Worst quartile	32% (Target 25%)	Worst quartile/ Lower threshold	24% at November 2007 (Target 23%)

Performance indicator	2004/05		2005/06		2006/07		2007/08
	Result	Quartile	Result	Quartile	Result	Quartile / CPA threshold	Unaudited performance
BV199b Percentage of land and highways from which unacceptable levels of graffiti are visible	-	-	17%	Worst quartile	20% (Target 10%)	Worst quartile	26% at November 2007 (Target 7%)
BV199c Percentage of land from which unacceptable levels of fly-posting are visible	-	-	3%	Worst quartile	3% (Target 3%)	Worst quartile	1% at September 2007 (Target 1%)
BV89 Satisfaction with cleanliness (adjusted for deprivation) (62% in 2003/04)	-	-	-	-	76% (Target 64.6%)	2nd quartile/ Middle threshold	-
BV90a Satisfaction with waste collection (72% in 2003/04)	-	-	-	-	81% (Target 81%)	2nd quartile/ Middle threshold	-
BV90b Satisfaction with recycling collection (adjusted for deprivation) (58% in 2003/04)	-	-	-	-	63% (Target 71.3%)	Worst quartile/ Lower threshold	-
BV90c Satisfaction with waste disposal (CA sites) (50% in 2003/04)	-	-	-	-	64% (Target 70%)	Worst quartile/ Lower threshold	-
Residents who felt rubbish and litter was a very or fairly big problem (BVPI user survey)	-	-	-	-	56%	Worst quartile	-
Residents who felt abandoned or burnt out cars was a very or fairly big problem (BVPI user survey) (54.4% in 2003/04)	-	-	-	-	20%	Best quartile	-

Source: Audit Commission Performance Profile 2006/07 and Council data